9/16/18 Sermon

Gospel Reading Mark 8:27-38

It was a perfect afternoon.

His wife was out shopping at the Mall.

He was settled comfortably in his recliner.

Snacks and drinks filled the table next to him.

He had control of the remote.

His favorite team was playing and they were expected to win.

And no one would interrupt during critical plays with idle conversation.

She was happily exploring one clothing store after another in the Mall,

without anyone to tell her to hurry.

The game had just ended when she returned home, happy and excited.

She had bought an absolutely gorgeous dress.

She put it on and modeled it for her husband,

who almost had a stroke when he heard how much it cost.

She agreed with him that it was very expensive.

But she told him how when she tried it on,

she looked so beautiful in it, she couldn’t resist the temptation to buy it.

Her husband commented, “You should have said, “Get behind me, Satan.”

She answered, “That is exactly what I said. I said get behind me, Satan.

And Satan did get behind me.”

And he said, “Uh ha. You’re looking rather fabulous from back here too!”

Jesus and his disciples were traveling to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. His time on Earth was growing short. As they traveled he asked his disciples:

“Who do people say that I am?

What are the rumors going around?”

And they answered: Some say you are John the Baptist. And others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.

Then Jesus got very personal. He centered his next questions directly to His disciples.

“But who do you say that I am?”

Matthew – who do you think that I am?

Thomas – who do you say I am?

John – who do you believe I am?

And Peter answered: “You are the Messiah.”

Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days’ rise again.

This was not a tragic mishap, or a failure in the plan, it was what was intended from the beginning.

Peter was horrified.

He could comprehend that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, sent by God.

But he could not accept that the Messiah would suffer. And die.

His idea of the Messiah did not include suffering and death.

So Peter rebuked Jesus.

But Jesus remembered his temptation in the desert with Satan.

And he knew what he came to earth to accomplish.

And he knew what it would require to save the people.

It was through Jesus that God would accomplish all that he promised throughout the Scriptures.

Here was Satan’s temptation all over again:

You do not have to suffer.

You do not need to experience death.

But Jesus knew the plan. He knew it was required.

And he loved his people so much he refused to be tempted.

And so turning to make sure the disciples were paying attention,

he rebuked Peter sternly: “Get behind me, Satan.”

You are not in control. You will not win.

You are setting your mind, not on divine things,

but on human things.

But in the end the divine will conquer.

D.M. Stearns was preaching in Philadelphia.

At the close of the service a stranger came up to him and said,

“I don’t like the way you spoke about the cross.

I think that instead of emphasizing the death of Christ,

It would be far better to preach Jesus,

the teacher and example.”

Stearns replied,

“If I presented Christ in that way,

would you be willing to follow Him?”

“I certainly would,” said the stranger without hesitation.

“All right then,” said the preacher,

“let’s take the first step. He did no sin.

Can you claim that for yourself?”

The man looked confused and somewhat surprised.

“Why, no,” he said. “I acknowledge that I do sin.”

Stearns replied, “Then your greatest need is to have a Savior, not an example.”

It is an incredible understatement to say Jesus was just a good teacher or example.

Unless we declare Him to be our Lord and Savior,

We set our minds on human things rather than divine things.

Who is Jesus Christ to you personally?

Who do you say Jesus is?

People today have all sorts of views of who Jesus is:

Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet,

But was not the son of God, or crucified on a cross.

Hindus believe Jesus is just one of millions of gods.

Buddhists, according to the Dalai Lama, believe Jesus is the model of a

“spiritually mature, good, and warm hearted person.”

Jews believe Jesus was a prophet and teacher, but no God.

Atheists deny Jesus ever existed at all.

And

Agnostics don’t know what to believe about Jesus.

Many believe Jesus is only a great teacher

With some good ideas about loving and helping others.

But who is Jesus to you?

A young woman went to a Christian store to buy a rosary for a friend.

She asked for the cross on the rosary to be removed.

The owner of the shop was surprised, and shocked.

She explained: “My friend doesn’t like the cross; she thinks it’s cruel.”

Well her friend was correct: The cross is cruel! It is incredibly cruel!

But without the cross there is no Christianity.

Without the cross there are only human things, there are no divine things.

It is easy to desire a Messiah, a redeemer,

but no one who would suffer and be put to death.

The cross stands at the very center of the Christian faith.

Without it Jesus would not have been the Messiah.

Without it we could not be His followers.

Jesus had to suffer to take away the sins of the world, to take away our sins,

So, for our sake, He did.

Some say he was an amazing magician who could turn water into wine and save the party.

Others say that he knew how to throw a great picnic with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. Many could say he was a great physician who could heal the sick and crippled, the blind and deaf. Or that he could stop a funeral in its tracks.

But there are those who know he is the Messiah;

the one who took away the sins of the world;

the one who took away our sins;

and it makes all the difference in our lives.

What we believe matters.

What we really, deep down in our hearts believe determines how we live,

what we do, and what we say.

What do you believe?

Who do say Jesus is?

Who is Jesus to you?

Amen